

What is claimed is:

1. A method for regulating access by users to a scarce resource, the method comprising the steps of:

5 receiving a request for access to the scarce resource;
determining whether the access level for said scarce resource is at a desired maximum;

responsive to determining that said access level is at a desired maximum, allocating to an access slot said requester;
10 and

providing said requester with a notification of their allocated access slot, access being available to said requester when said allocated slot is enabled.

15 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of providing said requester with a notification of their allocated access slot comprises:

issuing said requester with a ticket comprising access slot information, at least a part of said access slot
20 information being used by said requester to determine when said allocated slot is enabled.

25 3. The method of claim 2, wherein said access slot information comprises a start time for said access slot and an expiry time for said access slot.

4. The method of claim 1, comprising the step of:

downloading onto said requester's computer an executable program for preventing said requester from attempting to access said scarce resource until said requester's access slot has been enabled.

5

5. The method of claim 1, comprising the step of:
responsive to said requester re-requesting access to said scarce resource, determining whether said access slot is enabled; and

10 responsive to determining that said access slot is enabled, granting access.

15

6. The method of claim 5, wherein a re-request presents a ticket issued to the requester upon the first request, said ticket denoting an access slot information, said method further comprising the step of:

using said presented ticket to determine whether access is available to said requester.

20

7. The method of claim 5, wherein the step of granting access comprises:

diverting said requester to a first server hosting said scarce resource.

25

8. The method of claim 5, comprising the step of:
responsive to determining that access is not available, diverting said request to a second server, said second server

providing the requester with entertainment whilst waiting for said access slot to be enabled.

9. The method of claim 1, comprising the step of:

5 providing said requester with entertainment whilst said requester is waiting for said access slot to be enabled.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of determining whether said access level for said scarce resource is at a desired maximum comprises:

tracking the number of users currently accessing the scarce resource; and

comparing said number with a predetermined maximum value.

11. The method of claim 1, comprising the steps of:

receiving a late request for access to said scarce resource from said requester having missed access when available;

20 determining whether said scarce resource is able to accommodate access by said late requester; and

responsive to determining that it is possible to accommodate access, granting access to said requester.

25 12. The method of claim 1, comprising the steps of:

determining the average time spent accessing said scarce resource; and

determining the length of subsequent access slots based on said average time.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein said scarce resource
5 comprises a chain of resources.

14. The method of claim 1, comprising the steps of:
determining that said requester's slot is at an end; and
refusing access to the scarce resource by said
10 requester.

15. The method of claim 1, comprising:
determining that said requester's access slot is at an
end;
15 determining that said requester has not finished
accessing said scarce resource;
determining whether said scarce resource is able to
accommodate continued access by said requester; and
responsive to determining that said requester is able to
20 accommodate continued access, granting continued access to
said requester.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein said access slot only
applies to one of the resources in the chain and any other
25 resource in said chain is accessible whether or not said slot
is enabled.

17. The method of claim 1, comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for access to said scarce resource;
responsive to determining that said requester previously
opted to leave said scarce resource early, determining
whether said scarce resource can re-accommodate access by
said requester; and

responsive to determining that the scarce resource can
re-accommodate access, granting said requester with access to
said scarce resource.

18. Apparatus for regulating access by users to a scarce
resource, the apparatus comprising the steps of:

means for receiving a request for access to the scarce
resource;

means for determining whether the access level for said
scarce resource is at a desired maximum;

means, responsive to determining that said access level
is at a desired maximum, for allocating to an access slot
said requester; and

means for providing said requester with a notification
of their allocated access slot, access being available to
said requester when said allocated slot is enabled.

19. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein the means for
providing said requester with a notification of their
allocated access slot comprises:

means for issuing said requester with a ticket
comprising access slot information, at least a part of said

access slot information being used by said requester to determine when said allocated slot is enabled.

20. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein said access slot information comprises a start time for said access slot and an expiry time for said access slot.

21. The apparatus of claim 18, comprising:

means for downloading onto said requester's computer an executable program for preventing said requester from attempting to access said scarce resource until said requester's access slot has been enabled.

22. The apparatus of any of claims 18, comprising:

means, responsive to said requester re-requesting access to said scarce resource, for determining whether said access slot is enabled; and

means, responsive to determining that said access slot is enabled, for granting access.

23. The apparatus of claim 22, wherein a re-request presents a ticket issued to the requester upon the first request, said ticket denoting an access slot information, said apparatus further comprising:

means for using said presented ticket to determine whether access is available to said requester.

24. The apparatus of claim 22, wherein the means for granting access comprises:

means for diverting said requester to a first server hosting said scarce resource.

25. The apparatus of claim 22, comprising:

means, responsive to determining that access is not available, for diverting said request to a second server, said second server providing the requester with entertainment whilst waiting for said access slot to be enabled.

26. The apparatus of claim 18, comprising:

means for providing said requester with entertainment whilst said requester is waiting for said access slot to be enabled.

27. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein the means for determining whether said access level for said scarce resource is at a desired maximum comprises:

means for tracking the number of users currently accessing the scarce resource; and

means for comparing said number with a predetermined maximum value.

28. The apparatus of claim 18, comprising:

means for receiving a late request for access to said scarce resource from said requester having missed access when available;

means for determining whether said scarce resource is able to accommodate access by said late requester; and

means, responsive to determining that it is possible to accommodate access, for granting access to said requester.

5

29. The apparatus of claim 18, comprising:

means for determining the average time spent accessing said scarce resource; and

means for determining the length of subsequent access slots based on said average time.

10

30. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein said scarce resource comprises a chain of resources.

15

31. The apparatus of claim 18, comprising the steps of:

means for determining that said requester's slot is at an end; and

means for refusing access to the scarce resource by said requester.

20

32. The apparatus of claim 18, comprising:

means for determining that said requester's access slot is at an end;

means for determining that said requester has not finished accessing said scarce resource;

25

means for determining whether said scarce resource is able to accommodate continued access by said requester; and

means, responsive to determining that said requester is able to accommodate continued access, for granting continued access to said requester.

5 33. The apparatus of claim 30, wherein said access slot only applies to one of the resources in the chain and any other resource in said chain is accessible whether or not said slot is enabled.

10 34. The apparatus of claim 18, comprising:

means for receiving a request for access to said scarce resource;

15 means, responsive to determining that said requester previously opted to leave said scarce resource early, for determining whether said scarce resource can re-accommodate access by said requester; and

means, responsive to determining that the scarce resource can re-accommodate access, for granting said requester with access to said scarce resource.

20 35. A computer program comprising program code adapted to perform the steps of:

receiving a request for access to the scarce resource;

determining whether the access level for said scarce

25 resource is at a desired maximum;

responsive to determining that said access level is at a desired maximum, allocating said requester to an access slot; and

providing said requester with a notification of their allocated access slot,

access being available to said requester when said allocated slot is enabled.

5

36. A method for determining whether a user can be granted access to a scarce resource after an access slot allocated to said user has expired, the method comprising the steps of:

tracking at least one interaction by said user associated with said scarce resource;

responsive to an interaction, comprising a request, by said user for access to said scarce resource after the allocated access slot has expired, using at least one tracked interaction to determine whether the scarce resource can accommodate access by the user to the scarce resource; and

responsive to determining that scarce resource can accommodate access, granting said access.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein the request for access is a request for continued access, said request being the only interaction tracked.

38. The method of claim 36, wherein said scarce resource comprises a chain of resources and wherein the step of using at least one tracked interaction to determine whether the scarce resource can accommodate access by the user to the scarce resource comprises:

determining the point reached by said user in the chain.

39. Apparatus for determining whether a user can be granted access to a scarce resource after an access slot allocated to said user has expired, the apparatus comprising:

5 means for tracking at least one interaction by said user associated with said scarce resource;

means, responsive to an interaction, comprising a request, by said user for access to said scarce resource after the allocated access slot has expired, for using at least one tracked interaction to determine whether the scarce resource can accommodate access by the user to the scarce resource; and

means, responsive to determining that scarce resource can accommodate access, for granting said access.

40. A computer program for determining whether a user can be granted access to a scarce resource after an access slot allocated to said user has expired, said program comprising program code adapted to perform the steps of:

20 tracking at least one interaction by said user associated with said scarce resource;

responsive to an interaction, comprising a request, by said user for access to said scarce resource after the allocated access slot has expired, using at least one tracked interaction to determine whether the scarce resource can accommodate access by the user to the scarce resource; and

25 responsive to determining that scarce resource can accommodate access, granting said access.